

Yaquina Head

Outstanding Natural Area



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Yaquina Head Interpretive Center

From the wheelhouse of an historic ship to a recreated rocky island and its inhabitants to a full-scale replica of the lighthouse lantern — exhibits interpret the natural and human history of Yaquina Head.



A gift shop located inside the Interpretive Center offers a wide selection of books, gifts and souvenirs, educational items, and clothing. The shop is operated by Yaquina Lights Inc. All proceeds are directed toward educational programs and projects at Yaquina Head.

Interpretive and Education Programs

Beginning in 1890, lighthouse keepers were required to give visitors a tour of the lighthouse. Today ranger-led tours of the tidepools and lighthouse are offered from late spring through early fall. Call the park for dates and times.



Lighthouse Keeper
early 1900's

Historic Lighthouse

In the mid-1800s maritime commerce along the west coast was booming as a result of the opening of the Oregon and California Trails. The U.S. Lighthouse Service saw the potential of the basalt headlands to provide stable foundations and good locations for lighthouses



to guide trading ships along the coast. On June 8, 1866, President Andrew Johnson signed an Executive Order that set aside 3 1/2 acres for a lighthouse to be constructed at Yaquina Head.



Oregon Coast History Center Image

"Laborers painting the roof of workshop and store and chicken house. Also putting wire on fence around bluff." Keepers' Log, Yaquina Head Light Station, September 13, 1889

The light at Yaquina Head was first lit on August 20, 1873. At that time, the stately tower stood alongside a two-story keepers' dwelling, a barn, and outbuildings.

Maintaining the light was the primary duty of the lighthouse keepers. Days were filled with polishing, cleaning, and repairing, as well as tending gardens and livestock. Yaquina Head Lighthouse was automated in 1966, ending the era of station attendants.



Abundant Life

Whales, seals, murre, cormorants, pelicans, and rocky shore intertidal organisms are some of the wildlife you may see in their natural environment.

Whale Watching

Yaquina Head is among the best places along the coast to look for migrating gray whales. They can be seen from March through May during their northward migration to summer feeding grounds in the Arctic. A few whales usually remain in this area throughout the summer. From December to early February, whales pass the headland on their southern migration to breeding and birthing grounds in Baja, California.



Gray whale

Harbor Seals



Harbor seals live here year-round, and are usually seen on or around Seal Island. Look for them from Cobble Beach.

Seabirds and Shorebirds

Each year, thousands of seabirds nest at Yaquina Head. Pelagic and Brandt's cormorants, black oystercatchers, glaucous-winged gulls and western gulls live here year-round.

Birds you might see during the summer include common murre, brown pelicans, surf scoters, pigeon guillemots, and rhinoceros auklets.

Welcome to Yaquina Head

Yaquina Head is a narrow, coastal headland extending one mile into the Pacific Ocean. Formed of ancient lava flows, Yaquina Head's hard basalt cliffs and coves have endured the pounding ocean surf for 14 million years.

The lighthouse, tidepools, trails throughout the site, and the Interpretive Center offer many opportunities to explore and discover life at a coastal headland.

Visitors Before

For 4,000 years, Yaquina Head has provided coastal inhabitants with a one-mile long pathway into the open sea. Native Americans used this pathway as a place to hunt marine mammals, collect mussels, and seek spiritual renewal. Explorers, marine traders, and pirates used the headland as a navigational marker for over 300 years before the U.S. Lighthouse Service built the Yaquina Head Lighthouse on the headland in 1873. Yaquina Head Outstanding Natural Area protects this headland so that all generations can understand and appreciate its natural and cultural heritage.



"On the 6th at noon... we saw two seals and several whales, and at day break the next morning, the long looked for coast of New Albion was seen. At the northern extreme, the

land formed a point, which I called Cape Foulweather, from the very bad weather that we, soon after, met with."
Captain James Cook mooring at the mouth of the Yaquina River, March 7, 1778.

Explore the Headland

Follow any of the five trails on the headland for great views, photo opportunities, watchable wildlife, and natural enjoyment.



Please help us protect this special place

The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for managing the site, and for preserving the natural, cultural, and historic values of this outstanding area for future generations.

Lighthouse Trail



Walking time: Allow 15 minutes each way
Notes: Wheelchair accessible
Steepest Grade: 11%
Trail surface: Asphalt

This trail along the southern edge of the headland to the historic lighthouse is wheelchair accessible. Along the way, watch for harbor seals lounging on the rocks.

Salal Hill Trail

Walking time: Allow 12 minutes each way
Rating: Moderate
Notes: Stairs at base of trail
Steepest Grade: 36%
Trail surface: Unimproved

This relatively short but steep trail makes switch-backs to the top. Along the trail and from the top of “the big hill” are some of the best views around — south to Newport, out to the Pacific, and the forests to the east.
In the springtime, look for wildflowers in bloom.

Cobble Beach

Walking time: Allow 5 minutes each way (from top of stairs)
Notes: Steep stairs

If conditions are right, listen to the water rushing into shore, tossing and jumbling cobble stones – one of the most unusual sounds you’ll hear at a beach.

It took 14 million years to build this cobble beach – from boiling hot lava to eroded fragments. What do you think would happen if each of the hundreds of thousands of visitors to Yaquina Head took just one cobble? Soon this special beach would disappear.
Take care - the cobbles can make walking difficult.

Communications Hill Trail

Walking time: Allow 15 minutes each way
Rating: Moderate
Steepest Grade: 15%
Trail surface: Gravel road

A walk up Communications Hill presents a completely different community — a shore pine and Sitka spruce forest. Chipmunks, chickadees, and wrens are fairly common. The Coast Guard maintains navigation communications equipment on top of the hill.

Quarry Cove Trail

Walking time: Allow 10 minutes each way
Rating: Moderate
Notes: Some concrete steps
Steepest Grade: 33%
Trail surface: Asphalt/Gravel

Following the crest of Yaquina Head’s southern edge, this trail connects the Ocean Bluff Observation Area and Quarry Cove. You’ll have terrific views south to Agate and Nye Beaches.

Quarry Cove

Low tide is the best time to walk through Quarry Cove, a unique rocky intertidal area built (1992 to 94) from a former rock quarry. This area is wheelchair accessible, but may be slippery.

Ask at Interpretive Center if assistance is needed to get to the Quarry Cove.



The BLM at Yaquina Head

This 100-acre (40-hectare) site was established by Congress as an Outstanding Natural Area in 1980. The Bureau of Land Management manages Yaquina Head to preserve its natural, scenic, historic, educational, and recreational values for present and future generations.

Look for Whales!

Scan out toward the horizon and look for a plume of white spray, and a part of the back or the tail. You can also look for a crowd of people watching whales! Migrating gray whales usually make a series of shallow dives, blowing every 30 to 60 seconds, between deeper dives that last 3 to 5 minutes

We are all Partners in Protection

Please stay on the trails and do not disturb the wildlife or vegetation. Collecting shells, rocks, wildflowers or any natural objects — other than driftwood — is not allowed. Please leave them for others to enjoy.

